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Approximate year of publication:	1925
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Source country:	France (Original) and United Kingdom (Translation)
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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

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THE holy Curé d'Ars is one of the most remarkable figures of modern times. Not so very many years ago, his name was on the lips of countless thousands, and the events of the tiny village of Ars were of far greater interest to numberless souls than the political happenings of a period which was certainly neither dull nor uneventful. If, after perusing this volume, the reader still wishes to know something more of the life of this wonderful village parish priest, we would refer him to chapter five of Book IV of the *Imitation*. The nineteen verses of that admirable chapter might have been written after a study of the sublime priestly career of St. Jean-Baptiste Vianney.

M. Trochu's work is on strictly scientific lines. Instead of drawing on imagination or pious emotionalism—as too many would-be hagiographers have done—he drew on the most reliable of all historical sources—viz., the *Acts of the Process of Canonization*. The result is a book that shows us the holy man as he lived, thought, and spoke. There can be no doubt that the effect on the reader will be an increased sense of the reality of the supernatural, of reverence for the mysterious power of the Catholic priesthood, and of love for that Christian humility and abnegation which are the real secret of the saints.

The translator has thought it best to leave all French proper nouns untranslated, as well as certain titles with which all educated readers are familiar, such as “cure” “vicaire,” etc.; one or two names of towns which are frequently mentioned have been spelled in the usual English fashion, and distances are given in kilometers. The late war and the daily papers have long ago familiarized us with the weights and measures of the metric system.

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Chapter 1

FIRST YEARS (1786-1793)

THE VILLAGE of Dardilly¹ is set among the low hills that rise in the neighborhood of Lyons. One of its inhabitants was Pierre Vianney, husband of Marie Charavay.² Besides being a prosperous farmer, he was likewise a man of faith, and much given to the practice of the Christian virtue of charity. In July, 1770, the fame of his good works brought to his door a mendicant who was also a saint.

Tortured by scruples, Benoît Labre had just left the Trappist monastery of Sept-Fonds, where he had been a novice under the name of Brother Urban. He had now acquired a certainty that his vocation was to be a wayfarer for the remainder of his life, so he set out for Rome.

1. Dardilly, a commune of 1,100 souls, is situate some eight kilometers to the north-west of Lyons.

2. In *La Semaine religieuse de Grenoble* (November 30, 1905) there appeared an article by Mgr. Devaux, rector of the Catholic Faculty of Lyons, on the surname of Vianney, which he thinks originates from the Dauphiné. According to the learned rector, the primitive form *Vianeis* or *Vianneis* was a corruption of *Viennensis*, that is, a citizen of Vienne in Dauphiné. Hence it would seem that *Vianneis* and *Viennois* are synonymous.

The registers of Dardilly date back only to the year 1617. In that year, however, we find a record of the Baptism of Madeleine Vianey, daughter of Barthélemy Vianey and of Claudine Beluze. Authentic documents furnish us with a list of the ancestors in the direct line of the Curé d'Ars. They are: Pierre Vianey (great-great-great grandfather); Pierre (great-great-grandfather), born in 1655; Pierre (great-grandfather), born in 1689; Pierre (grandfather, mentioned at the beginning of this book), born in 1716; finally, Matthieu (father of our saint), born in 1753. All these were baptized in the church of Dardilly.

As regards the spelling of the name, though the ancestors of the saint wrote *Vianey*, we have no hesitation in spelling it *Vianney*, as he did himself. His younger sister, Marguerite, spelled the name in this manner when signing the process of canonization.

Various episcopal documents spell the name indiscriminately *Vianay* or *Vianney*, *Vianey* or *Vianney*; thus the dimissorial letters for the sub-diaconate have *Vianey*; those for the diaconate, *Vianay*; those for the priesthood, *Viannay*; faculty papers of 1832, *Vianney*; papers of 1853, *Viannay*.

CHAPTER I

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Benoît Labre was strangely attired. He wore the novice's tunic, which he had been permitted to retain on leaving the monastery. A wallet was suspended from his shoulders, a rosary hung round his neck, and a brass crucifix shone on his breast. A breviary, an *Imitation*, and the book of the Gospels constituted his luggage.

In these weird accoutrements he entered the small enclosure in front of the low-roofed house of the Vianneys.⁴ The master of the house received him as he received all destitute persons. The children gazed with pity at the hapless man in whom their parents had taught them to see Jesus Christ himself. Matthieu, one of the five boys, was there. Little did he guess, as he contemplated this youthful mendicant, so pale and so meek, who was telling his beads all the time, that one day he himself would be the father of a saint. In the vast kitchen, near the hearth, where, sixteen years later, the child of predestination would warm his little bare feet, Benoît Labre and his companions in distress sat down with the Vianneys before plates of steaming soup, followed by meat and vegetables. After grace and night prayers, the guests were shown a place over the bakehouse, where they were to sleep, and where a thick layer of straw was to be their bed. On the morrow, ere they departed, one and all thanked their hosts, but the refined, gentle youth expressed his gratitude in terms which plainly showed that he was no common beggar.

Great was the surprise of Pierre Vianney when, a little later, he received a letter from the poor pilgrim.⁵ Benoît

3. J. Mantenay, *St. Benoît Labre*, Paris, Gabalda, 1908, p. 27, *passim*.

4. The old farmhouse, with its two entrance doors facing the yard, has since had another storey added to it.

5. "The Curé d'Ars often spoke of this letter. He made a present of it to someone who asked him for it." (Frère Jérôme, *Procès de l'Ordinaire*, p. 533).

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Eight years after this event, on February 11, 1778, at Ecully, a village barely a league from Dardilly, Matthieu Vianney married

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